Carbon and Sustainability Data: How Indian Exporters Can Prepare for EU Buyers

A simple, practical guide for Indian manufacturers and exporters on CBAM, ESG reporting, and building EU-ready sustainability data

If you export goods to Europe, you have probably noticed a change in the last two years. European buyers are no longer asking only about price, quality, and delivery time. They are also asking about carbon emissions, sustainability certificates, and environmental data. This shift is not a passing trend. It is becoming a permanent part of doing business with the European Union (EU), and Indian exporters who are not ready may start losing orders.

In this article, we explain in simple English what carbon and sustainability data means, why EU buyers are asking for it, and how Indian exporters can prepare step by step. This guide is written for business owners, export managers, and factory teams, not just for sustainability experts.

Why EU Buyers Are Suddenly Asking for Carbon Data

The European Union has introduced strict climate and sustainability rules over the past few years. Two of the biggest ones directly affect Indian exporters:

- CBAM (Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism) – This rule requires importers of certain goods like steel, aluminium, cement, fertilisers, hydrogen, and electricity to report the carbon emissions used to make those products. From 2026, importers will need to buy CBAM certificates based on this carbon data.
- CSRD (Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive) – Large EU companies must now report on sustainability across their entire supply chain, including suppliers outside Europe. This means EU buyers are passing sustainability questions down to their suppliers, including Indian exporters.

Because of these rules, EU importers cannot simply buy products anymore. They must also collect emissions and sustainability data from every supplier in their chain, including factories in India. If your company cannot provide this data, buyers may see you as a risk and move their orders to a competitor who can.

What Kind of Data Are EU Buyers Asking For?

Sustainability requests can look different from buyer to buyer, but most Indian exporters are being asked for similar information. The common categories are:

1. Product Carbon Footprint

This is the total greenhouse gas emissions created while making one unit of your product, from raw material to factory gate. Buyers may ask for this in tonnes of CO2 per tonne of product, or a similar unit.

2. Energy and Fuel Data

Details of electricity consumption, type of fuel used (diesel, coal, natural gas, biomass), and whether any renewable energy is used at the factory.

3. Raw Material and Supplier Information

Where raw materials come from, and whether your own suppliers can share basic emissions or sourcing data.

4. Certifications and Policies

ISO 14001 (environmental management), ISO 50001 (energy management), factory sustainability policies, waste management practices, and worker safety or social compliance certificates.

5. Reporting Format

Many EU buyers now expect data in a specific format, such as CBAM communication templates, EcoVadis questionnaires, or their own supplier sustainability forms.

Step-by-Step: How Indian Exporters Can Prepare

Preparing for EU sustainability requirements does not have to be complicated or expensive if you follow a clear plan. Here is a simple roadmap:

Step 1: Start Measuring Your Energy Use

Begin by collecting basic data your factory already has, such as monthly electricity bills, diesel or coal purchase records, and production output. This is the foundation of any carbon calculation, and most factories can gather it within a few days.

Step 2: Calculate a Basic Carbon Footprint

Once energy data is ready, you or a consultant can calculate approximate emissions per unit of product using standard emission factors. This does not need to be perfect on the first try. A reasonable estimate is far better than having no data at all when a buyer asks.

Step 3: Keep Records in an Organised, Ready-to-Share Format

Buyers usually want data in spreadsheets or simple templates, not long reports. Keep your energy, fuel, and production data updated every month so you are never caught unprepared when a buyer sends a request.

Step 4: Work Towards Recognised Certifications

Certifications like ISO 14001 and ISO 50001 build trust with EU buyers because they show your sustainability data is managed with a proper system, not just prepared once for a single order. If certification is not possible immediately, having a written environmental policy is a good first step.

Step 5: Talk to Your Own Suppliers

If EU buyers ask about your raw material sourcing, you will need basic information from your own suppliers too. Start these conversations early, since smaller suppliers may need guidance on what data to share.

Step 6: Get Expert Support for CBAM and Reporting Templates

CBAM reporting has specific technical requirements, and getting it wrong can delay shipments or cause disputes with buyers. Many exporters choose to work with a sustainability consultant to set up the right calculation method once, so future orders become much easier to handle.

Common Mistakes Indian Exporters Should Avoid

- Waiting until a buyer asks before starting any data collection
- Sending rough guesses instead of properly calculated figures
- Ignoring smaller EU buyers, since mid-size companies are also under pressure from CSRD rules
- Treating sustainability data as a one-time task instead of an ongoing, updated process
- Not training factory staff on why this data collection matters

Why This Is Actually a Business Opportunity

It is easy to see carbon and sustainability reporting as an extra burden, but many Indian exporters are finding the opposite. Companies that can quickly share accurate, well-organised sustainability data are winning more trust from EU buyers, receiving longer-term contracts, and standing out from competitors who are still unprepared.

In short, being ready with your carbon and sustainability data is no longer just about compliance. It is becoming a genuine competitive advantage in the European market.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

1. Is CBAM compliance compulsory for all Indian exporters?

CBAM currently applies to specific sectors such as steel, aluminium, cement, fertilisers, hydrogen, and electricity. If your product falls outside these categories, CBAM may not

apply directly yet, but the EU is expected to expand the list over time, so it is wise to prepare early.

2. Do small and medium exporters also need to provide carbon data?

Yes. While large factories face the most direct pressure, EU buyers are increasingly asking small and medium exporters for basic sustainability information too, especially because of CSRD supply chain reporting requirements passed down from large European companies.

3. How long does it take to prepare a basic carbon footprint report?

For a single factory with organised energy and production records, a basic carbon footprint estimate can often be prepared within one to two weeks. Building a fully verified, certification-ready system usually takes a few months.

4. Can a consultant help if we have never done this before?

Yes, this is exactly the kind of work sustainability and carbon consultants specialise in. A consultant can guide you from your first energy data collection, through carbon calculation, all the way to CBAM reporting and buyer-ready documentation, so you do not have to figure it out alone.

Final Thoughts

The demand for carbon and sustainability data from EU buyers is only going to grow stronger in the coming years. Indian exporters who start preparing now, even with small steps like tracking energy use and organising basic records, will be far ahead of competitors who wait until it becomes urgent.

If your business exports to Europe and you are not sure where to start, getting expert guidance early can save time, protect your existing orders, and even help you win new business from buyers who value suppliers that take sustainability seriously.